



COVID-19 Emergency Rules Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 01.29.2021

Q: Where can I find the emergency rules and policies passed by the State Board in response to COVID-19?

Emergency rules passed by the State Board in response to COVID-19 can be accessed on the [Secretary of State's website](#). Additionally, all items considered by the State Board at its meetings can be accessed on the [State Board's meetings archive](#). This page includes links to the meeting agenda, each rule or policy considered, and the meeting recording. Any emergency rule passed by the State Board is only effective for 180 days after it is filed with the Secretary of State's office.

Questions Relating to the 2020-21 School Year

Q: Does the ACT graduation requirement apply to Seniors in the 2020-21 School Year?

[Public Chapter 652 of 2020](#), was the law that waived the various assessment requirements in the spring of 2020 in response to COVID-19. This law also amended T.C.A. § 49-6-6001 to state that 11th grade students in the 2019-20 school year did not have to take an assessment of postsecondary readiness in 11th grade (i.e. the ACT). These students are presumably now seniors this year. Since the State Board graduation requirement for students to take the ACT in 11th grade rests on the requirement contained in T.C.A. § 49-6-6001 and because that requirement was waived for 11th grade students in the 2019-20 school year, the ACT graduation requirement for students who were in the 11th grade in the 2019-20 school year is also considered waived.

The State Board still strongly encourages students to take the ACT to access higher education options and scholarships, and the Department of Education has worked with LEAs and ACT to provide multiple additional opportunities for students to take the ACT this year. However, LEAs should not deny a diploma to a 12th grade student who was in 11th grade in 2019-20 for failure to take the ACT.

Questions Relating to the 2019-20 School Year

Q. The emergency rules state that students taking courses for high school credit shall receive no grade lower than the grade they earned as of March 20, 2020. Is it permissible for districts to offer Pass/Fail as the grade? Can districts assign lower grades under the local grading scale?

Offering Pass/Fail grades would not be permissible for purposes of calculating student grades for the HOPE scholarship GPA under the [uniform grading system](#). The purpose of the uniform grading system is to ensure parity for all students when it comes to GPA calculation for purposes of obtaining state scholarships.

However, the local grading scale, which many school districts use for honors and distinctions such as valedictorian, is something over which local boards of education have always had control. The local grading scale is not covered by the emergency rule and school districts can make grading decisions under the local grading scale as they like, including allowing a student's grade to be lowered. If a school district wishes to utilize Pass/Fail for students under their local grading system that would be permissible as long as the local board of education approved it.

Q: The emergency rules state that students must earn a minimum of twenty (20) credit hours to graduate in 2019-20, including a minimum of two (2) social studies credits. Does that mean any two (2) of the three (3) social studies credits normally required for graduation will meet this requirement?

Students may graduate with any two (2) of the three (3) social studies credits normally required for graduation. A list of these courses is contained in the State Board's [High School Policy 2.103](#). We know many seniors were slated to take .5 credit social studies courses during the 4th quarter of their block schedule, which partially precipitated this decision.

Q: The emergency rule outlines graduation requirements in the four (4) core areas that total thirteen (13) credits. Do the remaining seven (7) credits have to be in specific areas (i.e. fine arts, focus area, world languages, wellness)?

The State Board's emergency rules amended graduation requirements for seniors graduating in the 2019-20 school year to require students to earn a minimum of twenty

(20) credits to graduate. These twenty (20) credits must include:

- 1. Four (4) credits of mathematics as described in the State Board's High School Policy 2.103;*

2. *Four (4) credits of English language arts as described in the State Board's High School Policy 2.103;*
3. *Three (3) credits of science as described in the State Board's High School Policy 2.103; and*
4. *Two (2) credits of social studies as described in the State Board's High School Policy 2.103.*

The remaining seven (7) credits needed to reach twenty (20) credits can be any combination of high school credit courses. Districts and schools should consider students' postsecondary plans as much as possible in prioritizing the additional credits; for example, students bound for four-year postsecondary programs may need two (2) world language courses for admission, while those going to a technical college may be best served by completing their Career and Technical Education program of study.

Q: If my school district does not offer students graduating in 2019-20 any opportunity to improve their grade as of March 20, what are options for students who have failed a course?

12th grade students scheduled to graduate in the 2019-20 school year who have failed a course may still be eligible to graduate as long as they have obtained twenty (20) high school credits including:

1. *Four (4) credits of mathematics as described in the State Board's High School Policy 2.103;*
2. *Four (4) credits of English language arts as described in the State Board's High School Policy 2.103;*
3. *Three (3) credits of science as described in the State Board's High School Policy 2.103; and*
4. *Two (2) credits of social studies as described in the State Board's High School Policy 2.103.*

If the student has failed one of the above courses needed for graduation under the emergency rule and the district does not offer any opportunity for the student to improve the grade, the student could still be entered into a credit recovery course. The emergency rule states: "LEAs and public charter schools may provide remote credit recovery opportunities for students who failed their first attempt at a course in spring 2020 in order to obtain a passing score."

Q: If a student in the 11th grade was on track to graduate early during the 2019-20 school year, but was unable to take the ACT or SAT during his/her 11th grade year, can they still graduate early?

Yes, [Public Chapter 652](#) waived the requirement that students in the 11th grade take the ACT or SAT to assess postsecondary readiness. Additionally, the State Board clarified in the emergency rules that students in the 12th grade who were unable to take the ACT or SAT during their 11th grade year could still graduate this year without taking the ACT or SAT.

Therefore, an 11th grade student should be able to graduate early without having to take the ACT or SAT as long as they have acquired all twenty-two (22) credits and other graduation requirements.

Q: If a student who was a senior in the 2019-20 school year is able to gain all credits required to graduate under the emergency rule over the summer of 2020, will that student be eligible to graduate?

Yes, Public Chapter 652 states the following: “The state board of education shall promptly revise the high school graduation requirements for the 2019-2020 school year to ensure that high school seniors who were affected by school closures during the spring of the 2019-2020 school year do not fail to receive a high school diploma for which the student was on-track and otherwise eligible to receive on or before the effective date of this act.”

A senior who graduates during the 2019-20 school year would include seniors who meet all requirements for graduation during the summer of 2020.

Q: Can students who were unable to take Advanced Placement tests still be awarded the extra weight on their grade?

Weighted credit courses requiring a culminating exam, such as IB or AP, will have the exam requirement waived for the 2019-20 school year. As such, students who were unable to take the culminating exam will not have the additional weighting removed from their grades. This applies to any student scheduled to take such an exam in spring 2020, including those who are not seniors in 2019-20.

Q: How should students be assigned grades in a Dual Enrollment course?

School districts should work directly with the institution of higher education (IHE) offering the dual enrollment course to obtain the student's grade as of March 20th and the student's final grade. If the IHE is able to provide the student's March 20th grade

and the student's final grade, the school should use the higher of the two grades for purposes of the student's high school transcript and GPA.

Q: Will districts be able to request individual waivers to address issues related to COVID- 19?

Yes, Public Chapter 652 states that "upon the approval of the state board of education, the commissioner of education shall waive a state board rule or statute that inhibits or hinders the LEA's ability to meet the LEA's goals or comply with the LEA's mission due solely to the outbreak of COVID-19 during the spring semester of the 2019-2020 school year". Additionally, the State Board clarified in the emergency rules that the waiver requests must be submitted to the Commissioner by June 30th, 2020.

The Department of Education will issue more guidance and provide a form for school districts to request COVID-19 waivers as described above soon.

Q: The emergency rule provides an extension to complete initial evaluations for special education and related services. How long of an extension will each district receive?

According to the emergency rule, the sixty (60) calendar day timeline for initial evaluations may be extended by the duration of an order, declaration, or recommendation to stay at home, self-quarantine, or implement social distancing that results in school closure. The timeline is restarted when that order, declaration, or recommendation is lifted. The order, declaration, or recommendation may be related to the recent tornados and/or COVID-19 outbreak. The duration of the timeline extension may vary from one school district to the next. As a result, one school district's extension may be longer than another's.

The Department of Education will issue more detailed guidance on how to calculate the length of a school district's allowable extension based on the duration of the order, declaration, or recommendation that that school district chooses to follow.

Q: I am an educator candidate who is scheduled to complete my preparation program in the spring or summer of 2020. Due to school and testing center closures stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to complete the required duration of clinical practice and/or obtain a passing score on assessments required for licensure. Can I still be recommended by my preparation program for an educator license?

Yes, the emergency rules passed by the State Board on April 9th include changes to [Educator Preparation rule 0520-02-04](#) and [Educator Licensure Rule 0520-02-03](#) to address this issue.

Candidates who have completed all program requirements, but were both unable to complete the required duration of clinical practice and obtain a passing score on assessments required for licensure may be issued a provisional practitioner license, valid through August 31, 2021. The provisional license may be converted to the standard practitioner license or advanced to the professional license when qualifying scores on required assessments are obtained and an application to renew or advance the license is submitted in TNCompass.

Educator candidates who have completed all preparation requirements — including assessments required for licensure — but were not able to complete the required duration of clinical practice may still be recommended for the full three (3) year practitioner or instructional leader license.

The Department of Education will issue more detailed guidance on the emergency rules related to educator preparation and licensure.

The State Board is working closely with the Department of Education and external stakeholder groups to identify any additional emergency and/or permanent rules that the Board may need to approve in response to COVID-19. Any additional rule changes will be posted on the [State Board's meetings page](#) ahead of the scheduled meeting where they are to be considered.